

local government? How can educational quality be measured? What is the quantity of county government that each citizen receives? Until these questions are answered, the information on economics of communities will be inadequate.

But the answers are needed. Local government officials, State legislatures, and Congress will need these kind of answers if the problem of population redistribution is to be solved. This neglected area of research is vital to some of our most pressing national problems. It can be understood only if substantially more resources are devoted to study and analysis of this elusive question.

“Main Street’s Too Narrow”

RICHARD J. EDWARDS

THE MAYOR had heard it all many times. “Main Street’s too narrow.” “If we ever faced a big fire, I don’t believe we would have enough water to fight it.” “I hope the State doesn’t check our sewer plant, we only half process the stuff.” “Premier Manufacturing considered putting a new plant here, but they said our town was behind the times.” “All we’ve been doing for 80 years is patching up this town.”

The Mayor had some comfort in the fact that not everyone was dissatisfied. A number of people liked a quiet town. They considered themselves lucky that they don’t have a lot of new people moving in. New schoolhouses are nice but cost money without any promise of a better education. The “best” educated move away anyhow.

Then too there is the landmark question. Widening Main Street would

probably mean that the old hotel, scene of every big banquet since 1853, would have to come down. Is expansion worth the loss?

A town renewal discussion carries with it many hot arguments. On the one hand, unless modernization is done, ours will be a ghost town. But on the other hand, think of all the money it will cost to rebuild streets, the sewage system, the school, the hospital, downtown, and just about everything. If growth doesn’t take place after spending all that money, we won’t even have the joy of a graceful retirement.

The Mayor was faced with a dilemma. How can we reach a decision about recommending some sort of physical renewal? The feelings for and against any idea are emotional. In his search for answers, the Mayor turned to an acquaintance at State University, who worked with community development problems of towns throughout the State. They talked about many things ranging from how the town got in the condition it is in, to the things that should be looked at in making renewal decisions. Some of what they discussed follows.

Like all towns and cities, ours had its day as a boom town. When it was named, it was a crossroads and little else. It was located on a favorable transportation path and became the major market of the surrounding area. Each year, things looked ever more prosperous. New homes, stores, repair shops and even an implement manufacturing plant were built, providing work for the sons who didn’t stay on farms.

Each new addition made something older look out of place. Frame and clapboard replaced log and plank; brick and mortar replaced frame. Water was piped in where wells had done the job. In a few years the

*

RICHARD J. EDWARDS is an Agricultural Economist in the Community Facilities Branch, Economic Development Division, Economic Research Service.

waterworks was replaced with a new one and many mains had to be dug up because everything was too small. Each time a street was ripped up, it was replaced with a more solid material. The physical structure of the town became more and more firm and difficult to change.

Among the improvements our Nation experienced was an improved transportation system. The markets for some towns grew ever larger while others, like ours, seemed to reach out less every year. For several years our town has not grown—comfortably holding its own. It has stayed comfortable for more than a generation. Now, will some of the additional 100 million or so people expected by the turn of the century decide that our town is for them? Most townfolk realize that few new people will settle here unless some modernization occurs.

The townspeople also understand—whatever change is proposed has both benefits and costs to be considered. A listing of possible alternatives, together with the associated costs and benefits of each, will greatly improve the decision making process.

Whenever possible, these costs and benefits should be given in dollar terms. Many important factors cannot be valued in dollars and cents, but they should be listed so the people can place their own importance on them. There are many groups of items that planners will consider in preparing such a report.

First, there is the broad category of better use of the community's resources. Well built modern schools and public buildings add greatly to a town's value. Not only do they add value in themselves, but they also enhance the value of the private property of a city. All neighboring property is increased in value by replacement of an obsolete structure with a new building.

Public buildings, streets, and utilities have a tendency to set the stage for private development. Few people are encouraged by the prospect of

building or remodeling next to an unkempt, 19th century courthouse or on a location serviced by poorly designed streets. Most citizens are proud of streets on which the traffic flows at a rapid pace, and proud of modern new public buildings. Private construction is encouraged in such an atmosphere.

Public revenue receipts should begin rising. The new buildings are worth more and local business should increase.

A renovated city has an advantage in attracting new business and industry. Most businessmen prefer to locate in areas that have adequate public facilities and services that show indications of vitality.

Per capita costs of operation should decline for some areas of municipal services. Well designed streets offer greater ease and efficiency in providing police protection. Fire departments should receive major benefits with the replacement of older structures and elimination of fire hazards. Maintenance costs of new utilities are lower than those replaced.

Savings to citizens in the operation of their private business and in their social life can be an additional benefit. A decrease in insurance rates and more efficient transportation are but two areas of decline in private expenses resulting from public action.

Another group of benefits are the social improvements that can accompany renewal. Redesigning the highways results in a decline of driver frustration at having to wait long periods of time in traffic clogged streets. The knowledge that an adequate supply of pure water is readily available gives security and peace of mind to all citizens.

The beauty and esthetic value of a planned new development add to the quality of life in the community. The level of housing in the city is improved. Areas of the city which are thought undesirable begin to diminish in number and size.

All of these items are difficult to total up in dollars and cents, but they

can be among the most important additions to a community's life.

Balanced against the gains are many cost areas. First, there is the big area of demolition costs and the loss of value of the old structures removed. Survey and planning costs are highly visible but valuable necessities. Largest single item is the cost of new public improvements. All of these are easily valued in dollars and are usually published.

A second area of costs is hard to estimate. Occasionally an improvement of generally broad-based benefit will actually cause a decline in value of some land. An expressway through part of a well-to-do residential area can have this effect.

Many times, items of historic interest are in danger of being lost or drastically changed. Their preservation may add greatly to costs of the renovation. The community is then faced with the difficult decision of appraising a part of its heritage.

Old neighborhoods often will be split or completely disrupted, changing established living patterns. City renewal can and has resulted in such major and expensive building in private construction that housing for lower income families is eliminated. The omission can lead to the additional cost of guaranteeing housing these families can afford.

Much of the value of the benefits, and weighing of the social costs, depends on expectations for the future. If a city still has good location advantages or some particular natural resource, it can expect renovation to encourage growth and activity. But if whatever advantages the city once had are no longer important, then first consideration must be given to changing this condition. Renewal of the physical plant of a town will provide greater benefits than the costs only if increased activity occurs.

With all the problems and pros and cons about renewal, why not forget the old places and build new towns? New towns *will* be created but not for the population increases America

is expecting. We already have a big investment in the existing towns and cities and it's less expensive to add to the plant in operation.

Most areas of the Nation already have a city or town located in them. Any new town proposal would likely have to be connected with an existing city. The task of organizing all the operations of a city—the amount of housing necessary, the shops, and the jobs—is enormous.

At the same time, older cities of all sizes are having problems with their physical plant. The saying, "Our town is just like New York only the buildings are not as tall," has some merit. New York City has circulation problems—a hardening of the arteries. Movement of people to and from work and shopping is a major problem. The people are struggling with the threat of a power shortage and the counter threat of major air pollution if some of the power plant proposals are followed.

Many other cities are faced with large parts of the city's structure being out of date. The new subway construction in San Francisco is but one example of attempts being made to tackle problems that have beset older cities for years.

Towns and cities across the land are continuing to look at themselves and plan for change.

Ava, Mo., is an example of a town of 2,000 people that was faced with many of the problems we have discussed. Factory owners looked at the town and decided against locating here. In the late 1950's, after a major effort, the main highway to the town was reconstructed. The new highway was straighter and it was three miles less to the next largest city.

When a new industry was seriously considering the town as a site, expansion and updating of Ava's water and sewage facilities were undertaken.

Within 3 years, two sizable new industries had located in the town with the aid of a local development corporation. Population of the town increased by 400. Property valuation rose almost

two-thirds and the tax rate declined a fifth.

The people in Ava were fortunate. They had sufficient advantages to continue to grow once the city's physical structure was modernized. In cooperation with the county government, they undertook some advanced planning. Renovation was not done too far in advance of prospective growth of a type which would help pay the bills. They had not financed frills. They did build a revitalized town.

Our Mayor and his friend said goodbye. It had been a big afternoon.

On the way home, the Mayor thought over all that had been discussed. He was convinced our town had a future as part of the growth America would experience. But what he and the town needed were facts.

The next few months would be busy. We need facts and planning to decide if Main Street really is too narrow.

What and Where of Community Services

E. J. NIEDERFRANK

COMMUNITY services—who needs them? We all do! But they occur and thrive or not according to demand. And demand for services varies depending on numbers of people and economic development.

It takes more than a lovely view or clean roadways to attract new people to a rural area. If community services, public and private, are lacking or inadequate, prospective new citizens may never arrive and native young people will not stay.

Viable communities nice to live in are those that contain an adequate mix of satisfying services and employment opportunities compatible with the size of the community and the characteristics of the residents. Where the community structure and population composition are constantly changing, the problem of providing an adequate mix of services becomes very serious. Useful services can be adequately provided only where there is a good base for their support.

When planning for development, there is a tendency to concentrate mainly on ways to attract new industry and retail business and thus create a flourishing community. This course, however, often bypasses the very important assessment of community services which will be needed by a more sizable population with progressive ideas.

New citizens in a town expect the schools to be good enough to prepare their children for college. They take it for granted that a good library will be close by. They expect adequate police and fire protection and good streets. They assume that the services of health facilities, hospitals, and doctors are conveniently available for them and their families.

But some of these community services are the very ones that are most deficient in rural areas. And a community cannot hope to draw and hold new people if it lacks any of these amenities of community life.

Community services are a function of two factors—population and economics. And even these factors are interrelated because you generally find population increases where the economic situation is favorable compared to other places. For where the economic base is small or shrinking, the population tends also to decline and community services become less and less in quantity and quality.

*

E. J. NIEDERFRANK is a rural sociologist in the Extension Service.